

Female Book Owners and Female Readers in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Hungary¹

István Monok

Translated by Jozefina Komporaly

Originally published as “A női könyvtulajdonos, a női olvasó a 16-17. században” in *A zsoldártól a rózsaszín regényig*. Petőfi Irodalmi Múzeum, Budapest, 2014, pp. 79-93.

Addressing this subject matter is not an easy task. We propose, first and foremost, to examine existing sources and hope that as a result we shall get an idea of the types of book owned by female members of Bohemian society in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, whether they actually read in the first place, and if so, what were the characteristics of this reading material.

Those researching illiteracy encounter paradisiacal conditions in the Kingdom of Hungary and in the Principality of Transylvania. It is an uncontested fact that book production was generally very modest throughout the entire war-ravaged East-Central European region, due to the scarcity of rags, itself resulting from poverty.³ Book imports were cheaper than local manufacturing, but their linguistic make-up was not really of service to women, who read primarily in their mother tongue – and not all women were in possession of reading skills in the first place. The German-speaking bourgeoisie had an indisputable advantage in this sense, considering that there was no shortage of books available in their mother tongue. Female members of aristocratic families did not start to follow changing trends in reading habits until the second half of the seventeenth century, and even then this shift initially only applied to wives of German and Italian origin and their immediate environment.

Students of illiteracy occasionally come across sources that lead to directions and readings other than the inability to read or write.⁴ Members of the aristocracy, including women, would dictate their letters, but would not necessarily refrain from writing in their own hand due to illiteracy, rather because it would have been considered impolite not to use the services of scribes, able to transform dictation into easily readable words.

¹ This study was supported by the IKT Programme for Social Renewal in the fields of knowledge and learning, and was carried out under the umbrella of the Human Performance Technology Research and Training Project TÁMOP-4.2.2.C-11/1/KONV-2012-0008. The project was also co-financed by the European Union and the European Social Fund.

³ It amounted to about 1-2 per cent of the book production registered in French-, German-, and Italian-speaking territories.

⁴ István György Tóth addresses the almost total illiteracy of early modern society in several studies: István György Tóth, *Schichten der Gesellschaft-Schriften der Kultur. Alphabetentum und Bücherkultur im südburgenländischen Raum im XVI. und XVII. Jahrhundert*, in *Türkenkriege und Kleinlandschaft. 2. Sozialer und kultureller Wandel einer Region zur Zeit der Türkenkriege*. Symposium im Rahmen der ”Schlaininger Gespräche” vom 26-30. September 1984 auf Burg Schlaining, ed. Rudolf Kropf, pp. 195–216, Eisenstadt, 1986; “Írni tanuló nagyszonyok” (“Noblewomen learning to write”), *Rubicon* (2) 1990/5; “How many Hungarian noblemen could read in the eighteenth century?” Central European University (CEU), History Department Yearbook, pp. 67–79, Budapest, 1993; *La diffusione dell’alfabetizzazione nel comitato di Vas nei secoli XVII–XIX*, in *Dalla liberazione di Buda all’Ungheria del Trianon. Ungheria e Italia tra età moderna e contemporanea*. Atti del Convegno storico italo-ungherese, Pécs, 23-24 April 1993, a cura di Francesco Guida, pp. 64–71, Rome, 1996. Tóth also published his findings in a monograph: Tóth 1996. Id.: *Illiterate and Latin-speaking gentlemen*, in Adamska and Mostert, 2004, pp. 519–528.

Similarly, sources consulted by István György Tóth among others can be interpreted in other ways too, even when scrutinizing the reading skills of peasant societies.⁵

A key question, therefore, is that of “reading,” “reading skills,” and the interpretation of book ownership. If the confessions of peasant women accused of witchcraft reveal that, although illiterate, they possessed knowledge derived from several “books,” then we need to seriously take into account the oral transfer of knowledge when analyzing “literacy.” When reading bodies of correspondence we regularly come across extracts that would benefit from endnotes to highlight citations from ancient authors, biblical sources, or contemporary collections of sermons. Details heard in sermons or on the occasion of local village saints’ days were not remembered only by people who could write, but those in possession of this skill were also able to make a record of interesting aspects.

A lot of empirically based information has been written down or published, but the intergenerational transfer of tradition and customs has been largely dominated by oral and practical means of transmission. In the case of religion, catechisms and topics relating to the annually repeating cycle of feast days enshrined in sermons are examples of this. Similarly relevant are particulars regarding nature, health, caring for the injured, information concerning cuisine, and basic notions to do with various trades. Whenever someone referred to such knowledge in conversation or in witness statements, they would often credit “books” as their reliable source of information, even in situations where they were actually unable to read themselves.

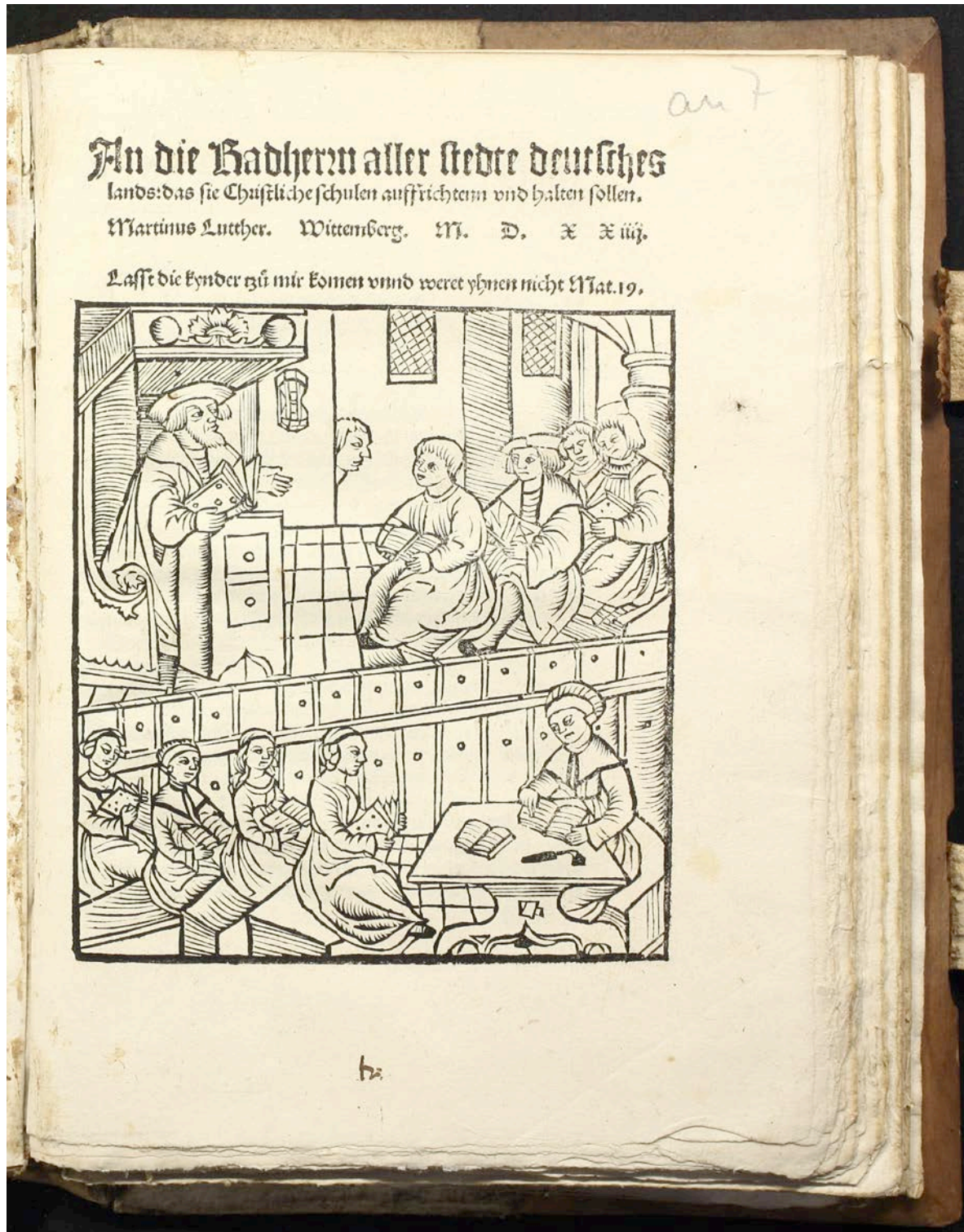
However, we can address female readership in the sixteenth century beyond such generalizations, although several factors need to be taken into account when documenting book ownership. There is no recorded evidence about books associated with female tenant farmers or servants. Strangely but understandably, sources refer almost exclusively to women belonging to the German bourgeoisie and the Hungarian nobility. The explanation of this is related to the prevalence and discipline of urban administration, and of pragmatic literacy more generally. Hungarian market towns paid relatively little attention to this, and archival material was often damaged in the Early Modern period, due to the vulnerability of these towns to attack. Nonetheless, Katalin Péter has succeeded in introducing us to the wife of István Miskolczi Csulyak, the daughter of the Calvinist minister from Mezőzombor, Judit Szikszai.⁶ This case study is particularly relevant, because it also conveys information, unobtainable from book catalogues, on the processes of learning to read and write, and about the use of books more generally.

The various Protestant churches followed Luther’s ideas on the development of an educational and cultural institutional system and the definition of its social status. When examining the Reformer’s call addressed to

⁵ We can draw informative comparisons between István György Tóth’s above quoted studies and the analytical methods of Ildikó Kristóf. István György Tóth, *L’alphabétisation des paysans en Transdanubie occidentale au temps des Lumières*, in *Début et fin des Lumières en Hongrie, en Europe Centrale et en Europe Orientale*. Actes du sixième colloque de Mátrafüred, 20-25 October 1984, pp. 293–300, published by Ilona Kovács. Budapest–Paris, 1987, CNRS; Ildikó Kristóf, “Istenes könyvek – ördögös könyvek (Az olvasási kultúra nyomai kora újkori falvainkban és mezővárosainkban a boszorkányperek alapján)” (“Godly books – devilish books: Traces of reading culture as reflected by witch hunts in early modern Hungarian villages and market towns”), in *Népi kultúra – népi társadalom (Folk culture – folk society)*. A Magyar Tudományos Akadémia Néprajzi Kutatóintézetének Évkönyve (Annals of the Ethnography Institute of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences), XVIII, pp. 67–104. Budapest, 1995.

⁶ Katalin Péter, *Miskolczi Csulyak István első felesége és gyermekei (István Miskolczi Csulyak’s first wife and his children)*, in Klaniczay and Nagy 1999, pp. 323–32; Id. in Péter 2012, pp. 26–33.

German aldermen on the necessity of establishing new schools,⁷ we also come across an illustration depicting a group of girls. The girls are holding books in their hands, and are seemingly making use of them too.



Martin Luther, *To the councillors of every town in the German lands that they should set up and maintain Christian schools*. Wittenberg, 1524 (Herzog August Bibliothek, Wolfenbüttel).

⁷ *An die Radheren aller Stedte deutsches lands das sie Christliche Schulen auffrichtenn vnd halten sollen*. Wittenberg, 1524.

There are frequent sources for the book ownership of women and girls, almost exclusively from estate inventories drawn up for probate. These sources specify the distribution of goods – including books – following the death of fathers or mothers. Sharing out occurred on the basis of property value, and in general it was the widow and the children who inherited. If there were only girls, it was they who inherited. Even if there were both sons and daughters, there is no evidence of gender-based distribution according to the topic of the books concerned.

Let us examine two case studies based on one smaller collection and one more significant one. Bartel Schneider, tailor, passed away in 1600 in the Transylvanian town of Beszterce (today's Bistrița in Romania). His eleven books were evaluated and then shared out between his two daughters, Anna and Barbara.⁸ The tailor must have been a well-read man, unless he had inherited the books himself. Among the key works of Lutheran theology were Luther's guidance on Christian life and Paul Eber's book on the sufferings of Christ, as well as a piece of writing by Johann Bugenhagen (it is not specified which one), several collections of sermons including an explanation of places mentioned in the Bible, a catechism, a songbook, a prayer book, and a herbarium. This small collection could, in fact, have constituted adequate reading for either sex. In addition to encouraging the day-to-day practice of religion, these works are suitable on the level of casual immersion in religion and belief, without requiring complex thinking.

A later example, dating from the seventeenth century, comes from Bártfa (today's Bardejov in Slovakia). I have settled on this case study because, by a lucky chance, we happen to have plenty of information on the family of Anna Glatz, who died in 1662. This is due to the survival of her brother's annotated copy of a Paul Eber almanac, including notes on various family events.⁹ Upon her death Anna Glatz bequeathed 33 books to her half-siblings, Margaretha Glatz and Johannes Corponei.¹⁰ These books form part of a genuine late humanist collection, put together by a collector seemingly interested in logic well beyond school textbook editions; they include volumes ranging from Aristotle to Petrus Ramus, the founder of a new system of logic in the sixteenth century. Dialectics and rhetoric appear via editions used for university-level teaching. Lutheran theology and internal debates within the Lutheran Church in the early seventeenth century, as well as literature proposing arguments against the Jesuits, are all part of the collection, as is a varied interest in languages: Greek and Latin sources sit side by side with Slavic and German ones, along with a Hungarian-Latin dictionary by Albert Szenczi Molnár. It is very unlikely that this collection was put together by Anna Glatz herself. Her father, Leonhard Glatz, attended university in Königsberg (today's Kaliningrad in Russia) at the start of the century, and upon his return he worked as a counselor in his home town. He passed away in 1634, when his son, Johann Glatz, took over his duties. Johann passed away in turn in 1660, and it is likely that Anna inherited the books from him. To judge by the authors and editions, it is most plausible that it was Anna's father who purchased these books. Subsequently, Johann Glatz's widow became the wife of chronicler Caspar Hain.

Rather than itemize all possible examples, let us take a look at a few other types of catalogue and document.

⁸ *Repository* 2004/I/13.

⁹ András Varga, *Egyháztörténeti feljegyzések egy Eber-féle kalendáriumban*, Lymbus, művelődéstörténeti tár (*Notes on church history in an Eber-almanac*, Lymbus studies in cultural history), vol. 1. Szeged, 1989, pp. 1–22.

¹⁰ *Repository* 1992, pp. 35–36.

Gergely Csorba passed away in 1570 in Debrecen and, according to the records, his widow renounced her right of inheritance in favor of their children. She was either unable to read, or books had no value for her any longer, while her children had the potential to benefit from them.¹¹

Barbara, wife of the bourgeois Thomas Werner from Bistrița made her will at Easter 1576. We have no knowledge of her husband, but Barbara had very firm views about her books. They had to be gathered together for her son, Johann Junior, and placed in the care of his guardian. The reason for this was that some of the books were stored at the local school; only the Bible, biblical commentaries, and some other “German books” were kept at home. This suggests that her late husband must have been a schoolmaster, or else the family assisted the school with books they lacked and needed, by allowing the school to effectively use these volumes.¹² It is striking that the author of the will pays utmost attention to the books, and is aware that accessing the collection could contribute to the shaping of her son’s future.

The belongings of an intestate shoemaker’s widow from Bistrița were distributed to her legal heirs in 1596.¹³ Catharina Galle left two orphan children, a daughter, Catharina, and a son, Martin. The eight books were divided as follows: the daughter received a Bible story in German, a book of medical advice (“Artzney Buch”), a school manual on dialectics, and a copy of Philipp Melanchthon’s *Loci communes*. The son received a collection of sermons by Luther, a daily Bible reading guide (“Losungen”), a mathematics book, and a prayer book. Seemingly, the distribution of books took place according to size and quantity, but what Catharina received were considered daily readings favored by women (although she could of course also have read the books inherited by her brother).

Bourgeois women, as well as women of noble origin, would utilize books in the course of their daily religious practice. In addition, they might have owned books relevant to various daily activities, depending on their skills and their family’s possibilities and customs. When dealing with books bequeathed by bourgeois women, I find it generally viable to look for a predeceased husband, father, or other ancestor behind the books left by each woman,¹⁴ so the readings listed should not be interpreted as a manifestation of a typically female library. Exceptions can only be identified following a detailed examination of books, and these date mainly from the second half of the seventeenth century. Rachel Sartorius (1684) is perhaps a genuine exception.¹⁵ The 26 titles in her collection bear testimony to a bilingual Hungarian and German identity. They include several prayer books, separate editions of various biblical extracts, and a high incidence of serious reflections. There is also *Pia desideria*, that is to say Pietist devotional literature, further biblical stories, a publication on true, presumably divine, love (“a book entitled *Verus Amor*”), fairy tales, and a spelling book.

In our research to date there has been only one case where the majority of the books owned by a bourgeois woman from the seventeenth century have survived, allowing us to access the books themselves. Attila Verók

¹¹ *Repository* 1983, p. 63. “Az vra könyweiből rezt Anna azzon nem vár, az giermekeknek engette.” (“Anna did not lay claim to her husband’s books, she let her children have them.”)

¹² *Repository* 2004/I, p. 3. “Mehr dem Johannis Jung meine bücher sollen eygen sein ihn die teudsche Bibel vnd der Postil vnd sonst teudsche büchern wol er bey der Schul die sollen dem Stiefvatter sein.”

¹³ *Repository* 2004/I, p. 10.

¹⁴ At times this is clarified by the catalogue. In 1683 in Segesvár (today’s Sighișoara in Romania) the bequest of “Frau L” included a collection of 35 volumes, put together in exquisite late humanist taste. The cataloguers indicated, however, that these books belonged to her late husband Ambrosius Pfarherr. *Repository* 2004/2, pp. 700–01.

¹⁵ *Repository* 1990, pp. 72–73.

has analyzed this case,¹⁶ and we published the archival document some years ago,¹⁷ but the books have also surfaced in Brassó (today's Braşov in Romania). Anna Weltherin, who died in 1690, owned a small school collection and some scientific works; however, one needs to research her family history and the annotations in the books in order to establish to what extent we can actually talk about a bourgeois woman with academic interests.

The relationship between women belonging to the nobility, the upper nobility in particular, and the world of books can be examined from various perspectives.

Female members of such families were able to read. At least they received an education that could be traced back to books,¹⁸ and originated from these. This may well be a form of knowledge associated with clothing, since we are aware of books on fashion dating back to the sixteenth century.¹⁹ To date, however, scholarship has only made us aware of specifically women's libraries – established by the wife of the head of the family – starting in the eighteenth century.²⁰ Nevertheless, it is worthwhile paying attention to data on women's book ownership. The latter may have simply emerged because a census was carried out due to inheritance in the female line, or because, when making a list of the widow's belongings, the books owned by the entire family were included. Books owned by Borbála Telegdi²¹ or Borbála Batthyány²² were only listed as items of property, whereas the personal reading materials of Judit Veér²³ and Anna Bornemissza²⁴ were explicitly characterized as such by the surveys.

Aristocratic women were in a position to acquire books partly due to their financial resources but also because they traveled more frequently to places where they could choose from the books on offer (such as Vienna, Graz, and other cities where there were booksellers). Their servants also often left the court to acquire various goods – clothing, spices, paper, and so on – and so could be tasked with the purchase of books.²⁵ Women of the nobility could also inherit books, or could end up with a significant quantity of books as a result of marriage. There are examples of book-loving women who were in possession of libraries of their own books or of books inherited

¹⁶ Attila Verók, "Régi könyvek mint a női vallásosság misztériumának lehetséges őrzői?" ("Old books as potential keepers of the mystery of female devoutness?"), in *A nők és a régi magyarországi vallásosság. Kegyetestörténeti konferenciák (Women and religiosity in old Hungary: Lectures on the history of Pietism)* (forthcoming).

¹⁷ *Repository* 2004/2, pp. 672–73, 675–78, 681.

¹⁸ A sceptic: István György Tóth, "Írni tanuló nagyasszonyok" ("Noblewomen learning to write"), *Rubicon* (2) 1990/5:

http://www.rubicon.hu/magyar/oldalak/irastudo_ember_utan_kene_nezni_az_irastudatlansagbol_az_alfabetizalt_vilagba/

¹⁹ *Gynaeceum sive Theatrum mulierum... figuris... expressos a Iodoco Amano...* Francofurti, 1586, Sigmund Feyerabend. Facsimile edition accompanied by a Hungarian translation: *Gynaeceum avagy Asszonyok szemléje, melyben Európa valamennyi jeles nemzetének ... női viselete látható...* Jost Amman rajzaival, a képekhez a bruges-i Franciscus Modius nyolcsorosait csatolva... (*Gynaeceum or the parade of women, in which the female attire of all European nations is on display... illustrated by Jost Amman, drawings accompanied by the poems of Franciscus Modius from Bruges...*) Introduced by Katalin Dózsza, trans. by Klára Kisdi, Budapest, 2005 (Amor librorum).

²⁰ Somkuti 1987; Somkuti 1991; Somkuti 1983; Deé Nagy 1996 (article reprinted in Simon and Szabó 1997, XXV–XXXVII).

²¹ *Repository* 2009, p. 32; Monok 1996, p. 205.

²² *Repository* 1992, pp. 110–13.

²³ *Repository* 1994/2, pp. 125–26.

²⁴ *Repository* 1994/2, pp. 71–74.

²⁵ As a general background, with examples and notes, see: István Monok, "A magyarországi főnemesség könyvgyűjtési szokásai a XVI–XVII. Században" ("Book collecting habits of the Hungarian nobility in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries"), *CaféBábel*, vol. 14, pp. 59–68.

from their parents. It is of particular importance that if a Hungarian aristocrat married a foreign woman, the latter had access to very different ways of acquiring books. Wives (or at times husbands) moving to Hungary from leading families of the Habsburg Empire, the German principalities, or the Italian city states brought more modern, almost contemporary publications with them to their new Hungarian or Transylvanian courts.²⁶ Entertainment, civilized life, and the reading of books are also interrelated phenomena. In this period there was a theory of reading, just as there was a theory of organizing court life. These theories also emerged in the libraries of the Hungarian nobility, although their presence was a relative rarity. The same could be said about books on fashion or works about various games. Entertaining literature typically meant Latin editions of ancient Roman authors, and Hungarian and Transylvanian bibliographies seldom included German, Italian, or French literary items. The latter become more frequent toward the end of the seventeenth century, by which time even ancient authors would be read in these three languages, and when works describing the rules of courtship and love also emerged. These would be read not only by noblemen but also by female members of their court. Women's reading included, in addition to books on the daily practice of religion,²⁷ works detailing self-medication recommended for the home,²⁸ cookery books, publications containing lifestyle advice,²⁹ and of course literary works. It is natural therefore that if high-ranking women, in their capacity as patrons of culture, supported book publishing, they would want to immortalize their names with works in these fields.³⁰ Let us examine a few examples in chronological order.³¹

Orsolya Kanizsai is a favorite figure of most historians of her era, and her romance with and marriage to Tamás Nádasdy is indeed noteworthy. The correspondence between the family and their family doctor is a unique source to have survived from the period,³² and also offers numerous minor details on the ailing Orsolya Kanizsai's awareness of book-related matters. The family had a modern court built at Sárvár for the needs of their noble retainers.³³ Girls living at the court in the immediate entourage of Orsolya Kanizsai became familiar with numerous behavioral norms (for conversation, dance, eating habits, etc.), in addition to the practical

²⁶ András Koltai, "Magyar főrendek külföldi feleségei a 16–17. Században" ("Foreign wives of Hungarian nobility in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries"), in *Tanulmányok Péter Katalin 70. születésnapjára* (*Studies in homage to Katalin Péter on her seventieth birthday*), eds. Gabriella Erdélyi and Péter Tusor. Budapest, 2007, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Institute of Historical Studies, *Történelmi Szemle* (*Historical Review*) (49) 2007/2, CD-ROM appendix), <http://mek.oszk.hu/09300/09378/09378.pdf> pp. 313–323; Monok 2012, p. 273.

²⁷ For a complex picture: Péter 1985. Id., *Papok és nemesek. Magyar művelődéstörténeti tanulmányok a reformációval kezdődő másfél évszázadból* (*Priests and nobles. Studies on Hungarian cultural history, 150 years from the Reformation onward*), Budapest, 1995 (A Ráday Gyűjtemény Tanulmányai (*Studies of the Ráday Collection*), 8), pp. 31–55. For an analysis: Pesti 2009.

²⁸ R. Várkonyi 1984; Sárdi 2004 (with references to Potentia Dersffy /1555/, Éva Lobkowitz Poppel /1622–43/, Krisztina Nyári /1628/, Anna Apafi /1677/).

²⁹ V. László 2007.

³⁰ Taking into account the patronage of noblewomen and the findings and methodology of European specialist literature, Brigitta Pesti analyzed and synthesized the relevant Hungarian literature in the field: Pesti 2010; Pesti 2013: the appendix provides information on all the important patrons of the era under investigation.

³¹ The following are to be taken as examples rather than a critical assessment of the reading materials or patronage of noblewomen.

³² "Szerelmes Orsikám ..." *A Nádasdyak és Szegedi Kőrös Gáspár levelezése* ("My darling Orsi ..." *The correspondence of the Nádasdy family with Gáspár Szegedi Kőrös*), ed. Tivadar Vida, postscript by Tamás Grynaeus, Budapest, 1988.

³³ A succinct bibliography of this rich literature can be found in the proceedings of the latest Tamás Nádasdy conference, and in János Sylvester's bibliography: *Nádasdy Tamás (1498–1562) emlékezete. 500 éve született Magyarországon nádora* (*In memoriam Tamás Nádasdy (1498–1562). 500 years since the birth of the Hungarian Palatinus*), ed. István Söptei, Sárvár, 1998; *Sylvester János bibliográfiája* (*János Sylvester's bibliography*), ed. Lilla Nagyné Pirocska, introduced by Lajos Kuntár, Sárvár–Szombathely, 1987.

knowledge they acquired on the basics of overseeing farming activities and, above all, learning to grow flowers, fruit, and vegetables. The Protestant school founded at Sárvár-Újsziget, the church and rectory dedicated to the new religion of Lutheranism, and the printing press founded in 1539 constitute institutions of Hungarian culture that distinguish the Nádasdy court from other contemporary centers of nobility. We have no information on the Nádasdy library catalogues, but the spiritual horizon of works created there is well known, as are the potential cultural influences on the wife of the head of the family.³⁴

A contemporary of Orsolya Kanizsai, Borbála Somy from nearby Alsólendva (Lendava in today's Slovenia), is a lesser-known figure from Hungarian historical works on the sixteenth century. Only six of her letters addressed to her husband are known to us,³⁵ and even documents relating directly to her tell us little about her reading materials. Moreover, we have only modest information on the Bánffy library too.³⁶ But the fact that in the dedication to the first part of his five-volume work (*Postilla*) Péter Bornemissza acknowledges the support of László Bánffy and his wife Borbála Somy,³⁷ and that the second volume is dedicated outright to Somy,³⁸ not to mention that we have extensive information on the court culture of mid-sixteenth century Lendava, we can safely assume that she participated in an active fashion in the shaping of this work.

As with Orsolya Kanizsai, the letters written by Erzsébet Czobor³⁹ and Éva Lobkowitz Poppel⁴⁰ to their respective husbands have also survived. Both women were surrounded by doctors and books,⁴¹ but in day-to-day medical matters they relied heavily on the oral tradition.⁴² Both women were left with serious tasks in terms of negotiating public life, and proved to be effective at managing their estates.⁴³ The relationships of Ferenc

³⁴ On the Nádasdy courts see Ferenc Szakály, "A sárvári 'provinciális humanista kör' és a reformáció kezdetei" ("The 'provincial humanist circle' at Sárvár and the beginnings of the Reformation"), in Glatz 1993, pp. 83–96; Katalin Péter, "Nádasdy Tamás mecénási tevékenységéről" ("On Tamás Nádasdy's activities as a patron"), in id., *Papok és nemesek. Magyar művelődéstörténeti tanulmányok a reformációval kezdődő másfél évszázadból* (*Priests and nobles. Studies on Hungarian cultural history, 150 years from the Reformation onward*), Budapest, 1995 (A Ráday Gyűjtemény tanulmányai) (Studies of the Ráday Collection) 8, pp. 56–65; István Monok, "A Nádasdy-család sárvári és pottendorfi udvara és könyves műveltsége" ("The Nádasdy family's courts in Sárvár and Pottendorf, and their book culture"), in id. 2005, pp. 68–86; Katalin Péter, "Imitatio Rei publicae Litterariae. Count Tamás Nádasdy," in *Republic of Letters, humanism, humanities*, ed. Marcell Sebők, Budapest, 2005, CEU (Collegium Budapest Workshop Series, 15), pp. 150–69; in Hungarian, "Nádasdy Tamás," in Péter 2012, pp. 97–116.

³⁵ Béla Tantalics, *A Bánffy család szellemi hagyatéka* (*The intellectual legacy of the Bánffy family*), Lenti, 2009, p. 264.

³⁶ István Monok, "A Bánffy-család alsólendvai udvara és könyves műveltsége" ("The Bánffy court in Lendava and its book culture"), in Monok 2005, pp. 61–67.

³⁷ Sempte, 1573 (RMNy 333).

³⁸ Sempte, 1574 (RMNy 355).

³⁹ *Bethlenfalvi Gróf Thurzó György levelei nejéhez Czobor-Szent-Mihályi Czobor Erzsébethez* (*The letters of Graf György Thurzó from Bethlenfalva to his wife Erzsébet Czobor from Czobor-Szent-Mihályi*), ed. Edmund Zichy, Budapest, 1876.

⁴⁰ Publication by József László Kovács and Péter Ötvös forthcoming from the repository series at Szeged. Also cf. Kincses 1993.

⁴¹ István Monok, "Czobor család könyvei" ("The books of the Czobor family"), in *Magyar művelődéstörténeti lexikon LX. minden kor. Ángyod térde – "Zsúpra aggnő". A főszerkesztő, Kőszeghy Péter hatvanadik születésnapjára* (*Encyclopaedia of Hungarian cultural history. LX. All ages. A-Z. In homage to editor-in-chief Péter Kőszeghy on his sixtieth birthday*), eds. István Bartók, István Csörsz Rumen, József Jankovics, and Géza Szentmártoni Szabó, Budapest, 2011, pp. 48–50; Id., "A Batthyány-család németújvári udvara és könyves műveltsége" ("The Batthyány family court in Güssing (Austria) and their book culture"), in Monok 2005, pp. 87–104.

⁴² R. Várkonyi 1984, pp. 36–37.

⁴³ Lengyel 2007; Katalin Mária Kincses, "Egy nyugat-magyarországi párhuzam: Batthyány Ferencné Lobkowitz Poppel Éva udvartartása" ("A parallel from western Hungary: The court of Ferenc Batthyány's wife, Éva

Batthyány with the intelligentsia of his day – Bálint Balassi, Kristóf Lackner, Albert Szenczi Molnár, and others – are well known, and his court was open to receiving foreigners too. His wife, and members of the court accompanying her to Hungary, further broadened this cultural horizon, which led to the emergence of modern concepts at the Batthyány estate. Following the outbreak of the Thirty Years' War numerous Protestant priests arrived from Czech and Silesian territories and from the Palatinate, and were met with a warm reception.⁴⁴ Éva Poppel was an educated woman herself, and although we are only aware of a herbarium owned by her,⁴⁵ her correspondence with her husband is ample evidence of her literacy.

Ferenc Esterházy converted to Protestantism, and one of his sons, Tamás, became a Lutheran pastor; his daughter learned to read and write and also had some knowledge of Latin and modern foreign languages. The fact that books had an appropriate role in their household can also be evidenced from Zsófia Esterházy's attraction to books.⁴⁶ We are aware of two books of hers, both purchased before her marriage to Márton Révay (d. 1630). The collected works of Isocrates and the Jewish history of Josephus Flavius are not typical female reading, and we do not know why exactly she held these particular works so dear. Her annotations indicate, however, that she handled the Isocrates collection (an exquisite Wittenberg hardbound volume) with the seriousness of a true bibliophile. The ex-libris is written *Comitissae Sophiae Ludovicae Amaliae Wilhelminae Crescentiae Esterházy de Galántha*: in my view, including her full name is a sign of this seriousness. Her books were inherited by her son, László Révay.

The Révay family also paid a lot of attention to the nurturing of book-related elements in court culture,⁴⁷ in addition to the education of girls.⁴⁸ Pál Nádasdy's widow, Judit Révay, remarried in 1638, to Ádám Forgách,⁴⁹ and passed away in 1643. Noémi Viskolcz has discovered a catalogue that includes the books found in Judit Révay's room in Galgóc (today's Hlohovec in Slovakia).⁵⁰ There are no surprising items on the list of five books, which provide confirmation of the fact that Révay converted to Catholicism. The authors of the beautifully bound books are Péter Pázmány, Lőrinc Ferenczffy, Thomas à Kempis (in Pázmány's translation), and two prayer books in Hungarian. In other words, these are books on religious practice offering in-depth meditations on religious issues.

Lobkowitz Poppel"), in Tamás 2000, vol. I, pp. 171–82. Cf. Katalin Mária Kincses, "Batthyány Ferenczné Lobkowitz Poppel Éva özvegyi évei" ("The widowhood of Ferenc Batthyány's wife, Éva Lobkowitz Poppel"), in R. Várkonyi 1997, pp. 64–83.

⁴⁴ István Monok, "Die kulturvermittelnde Rolle des Batthyány-Hofes an der Wende vom 16. zum 17. Jahrhundert" ("The Batthyány court's role in cultural mediation at the turn of the sixteenth-seventeenth century"), in *Deutsche Sprache und Kultur, Literatur und Presse in Westungarn/Burgenland (German language and culture, literature and the press in Western Hungary and Burgenland)*, eds. Wynfrid Kriegleder and Andrea Seidler, Bremen, 2004, pp. 75–90.

⁴⁵ S. Sárdi 2004.

⁴⁶ Zoltánné Soltész, "Révay Mártonné Esterházy Zsófia Isocrates-kötetének kötése és későbbi possessorai" ("The binding and subsequent owners of the Isocrates volume of Zsófia Esterházy, wife of Márton Révay"), *Magyar Könyvszemle (Hungarian Book Review)* (111) 1995/2, pp. 131–41.

⁴⁷ Klára Komorová, "A Révay család könyvtára" ("The library of the Révay family"), in Monok 2005, pp. 159–69; Id., "Šľachtický dvor Révaiovcov ako centrum vzdelanosti Turca," *Forum Historiae*, online 2008/2: http://www.forumhistoriae.sk/FH2_2008/texty_2_2008/komorova.pdf; Monok 2012, pp. 191–200.

⁴⁸ Miloš Kovačka, "Šľachtické ženy rodu Révai v slovenských a Turčanských evanjelických dejinách," in *Rod Révai v slovenských dejinách. Zborník prác z interdisciplinárnej konferencie 16.–17. September 2008. Martin*, eds. Miloš Kovačka, Eva Augustínová, and Maroš Mačuha, Martin, 2010, Slovenská národná knižnica (Studia historico-bibliographica Turocensia. Zv. 3), pp. 152–88.

⁴⁹ Sándor Payr, "Révay Judit, a hitehagyott Nádasdy Ferenc édesanyja" ("Judit Révay, mother of the renegade Ferenc Nádasdy"), *Protestáns Szemle (Protestant Review)* (25) 1913, pp. 65–86, 145–60.

⁵⁰ *Repository* 2010, p. 3.

We may now turn to two examples in which the wives came from abroad. István Pálffy married Eva Susanne, the daughter of Graf Johann Christoph Puchheim von Göllersdorf, in 1618. The list of belongings from their house, dating from 1644, refers to sixteen books.⁵¹ The linguistic breakdown of these books is striking at first sight: there are nine German, five Latin, and two Hungarian volumes. One of the two Bibles is also in German. It is likely that the German books were brought to Hungary by Pálffy's wife. The Hungarian books are collections of sermons by Péter Pázmány and György Káldi, while the Latin ones are the works of Johannes Chrysostomus and Nicephorus Callixtus; there is a Hungarian history by Istvánffy and an occasional publication on the funeral of Charles V. It is not out of the question that Eva Susanne started to learn Hungarian, or that she was getting acquainted with the history of her new country. The German prayer books could have been her own, but it is strange that being a Catholic she owned a copy of the psalms with Luther's comments. In her surroundings she must have had German staff too, which explains the German cookery book (*Kochbuch*). A potentially exciting and entertaining read – in Hungary but also in Austria – was *Libri Germanici duo in quarto de Navigatione Hollanda*, of which hundreds of copies circulated at the time.⁵²

The third wife of judge royal Ádám Forgách was Anna Katharina von Rechberg. His son, also named Ádám, prefect of Nógrád county, also married a foreign woman, Eva Katharina von Breuner, in 1648. He passed away as a widower in 1681, having lived in Eperjes (today's Prešov in Slovakia). The belongings found in their house were surveyed in 1683 on the orders of Imre Thököly.⁵³ Unfortunately the books were catalogued very carelessly, without including all titles. The last item to be mentioned is "some books," although the items actually listed are very telling. There is a *Chronica Polonorum* and a German Bonfini edition,⁵⁴ which could also be read by a woman living as a stranger in a foreign land in order to get acquainted with her new environment. We may complement our examples of the ownership of books on various subjects with the cases of two women whose names can be associated with the creation of literary works. Around the time of the death of Miklós Zrínyi (Nikola Zrinski), his brother Péter spent extended periods of time at Csáktornya (today's Čakovec in Croatia). He even brought a selection of books with him from his library in Ozaly (Ozalj in today's Croatia),⁵⁵ not only for his personal use but also for his wife, Katalin Frangepán (Katarina Frankopan/Zrinska). She was a writer herself,⁵⁶ and would have surely found it difficult to get by without relying on her books.

⁵¹ *Repository* 1986, p. 151.

⁵² Further examples: *Schiffahrten. Gesammelt und herausgegeben durch Levinus HULSIUS*. By 1619, Nicolaus Hoffmann had published sixteen parts in Frankfurt am Main. Teil 16: *Die sechtzehende Schiffahrt, Journal, Oder Beschreibung der wunderbaren Reise Wilhelm SCHOUTEN auß Hollandt, im Jahr 1615. 16. vnd 17. Darinnen er eine neuwe Durchfahrt neben dem Freto Magellanico, welche bißhero noch vnbekannt gewesen, in die Suyd See entdeckt. Beneben erzehlung, was für Land, Insuln, Leut, allda gefunden, vnd sich sonsten auff der Reise in der SuydSee zugetragen. Mit schoenen LandCharten, vnd Kupfferstuecken erkläert*. Gedruckt zu Franckfurt am Mayn, durch Nicolaum Hoffmann, sumptibus Hulsianis. Im Jar M.DC.XIX.

⁵³ *Repository* 1983, p. 583.

⁵⁴ *Ungerische Chronica, Das ist Ein gründtl. beschreibung deß allermächtigsten und gewaltigsten Königr. Ungern... erstl. durch... Antonium Bonfinium in 45. Büchern in Lat. beschr. Jetzund aber...in gut gemein Hochdeutsch gebr. durch P. F. N. und mit schönen Fig., sampt einem nützl. Reg. gezieret...* Gedruckt zu Franckfurt am Mayn durch Peter Schmidt. In verlegung Sigmund Feyerabendts, 1581. I do not think this is the same as the 1545 partial edition from Basel.

⁵⁵ *Repository* 1992, pp. 55–58.

⁵⁶ Her (travel) prayer book was published in Venice: *Putni tovaruš ... 1661*. On the modern facsimile edition and Katalin Frangepán's activity as a writer, see István Lőkös, "'Zriniana' – csáktornyai 'triptichon'," *Hitel* (20) 2007/6, pp. 115–18.

László Rákóczi had no male heir, and with him the Catholic branch of his family died out. His daughter Erzsébet was one of the first Hungarian women writers,⁵⁷ and lived in Kistapolcsány during the final years of her life. After her death Prince Francis II Rákóczi had the books found in her property transferred to Sárospatak. The catalogue dating from 1708 mentions 26 publications in total.⁵⁸ Some of the books may have been inherited: the collected works of Cyprianus, a “Polish history,” a map of Silesia, a few German books (listed as such), a grammar book, a catechism, and a number of Hungarian works aimed at spiritual edification. Compared to other contemporary female-owned libraries, this collection of works written mainly in the indigenous language demonstrates that Erzsébet Rákóczi was an active reader. In his portrayal of her, Kálmán Thaly notes that this poet, with an active lifestyle and a passion for hunting, would have favored work expressing profound and personal devoutness.⁵⁹ She was a supporter of the propagation of Mariolatry in Hungary, and this catalogue of her books also lists a number of icons.

Women of the upper nobility, and noblewomen more generally, spent the majority of their lives in the absence of their husbands. One of their most important duties was to deputize for the head of the family, and to supervise court life and the management of the estate. Such women would also have been frequently approached with their problems by the various religious communities and congregations living on their estates. They would often have been required to take independent decisions, and in such matters they could not rely exclusively on stewards, the court pastor, or the schoolmaster. In other words, they needed to prepare for this role. Neo-romantic historiography made a point of celebrating heroic noblewomen,⁶⁰ and rightly so, but over the last thirty years the examination of sources together with a change of approach has moved on to a more fine-grained analysis of their tasks and roles.⁶¹ We know nothing of Erzsébet Báthory’s⁶² personal reading habits, and can only reconstruct her knowledge *per analogiam*. Similarly, we can only approach Princess Zsuzsanna Lorántffy’s⁶³ erudition in this manner,⁶⁴ as there are no known catalogues detailing the books kept by her for personal use. By the second half of the seventeenth century the libraries of the nobility start to acquire books on farming and the organization of court life, and those women who participated in carrying out these duties would most probably have taken advantage of the possibility of learning about them.⁶⁵

⁵⁷ Cf. Rákóczi Pál, *Rákóczi László és Rákóczi Erzsébet emlékezete* (*The remembrance of Pál Rákóczi, László Rákóczi and Erzsébet Rákóczi*), ed. Ferenc Sipos. Újfehértó, 1993 (Újfehértó Pamphlets, 6); Gabriella Uhr, *Gróf Rákóczi Erzsébet levelei Esterházy Pál herceghez (1671–1704)* (*The letters of Graf Erzsébet Rákóczi to Prince Pál Esterházy (1671–1704)*), Lymbus V. Szeged, 1994, pp. 51–76. (Klly: Lymbus Pamphlets 35); Rákóczi Erzsébet levelei férjéhez 1672–1707 (*The letters of Erzsébet Rákóczi to her husband, 1672–1707*), eds. Borbála Benda and Gábor Várkonyi, Budapest, 2001 (Millenniumi magyar történelem. Források) (Millennial Hungarian history. Sources).

⁵⁸ *Repository* 1992, pp. 174–75.

⁵⁹ Kálmán Thaly, “Gróf Rákóczi Erzsébet, mint költő” (“Graf Erzsébet Rákóczi as a poet”), *Századok* (34) 1900, pp. 481–94.

⁶⁰ Emőd Farkas, *Magyarország nagyasszonyai* (*Hungarian noblewomen*), Vols. 1–2. Budapest, 1911, Wodianer (facsimile: Budapest, 1990).

⁶¹ R. Várkonyi 1997; Lengyelová 2004; Fábri and Várkonyi 2007.

⁶² Katalin Péter, *A csejtei várúrnő: Báthory Erzsébet* (*The Lady of Csejte/Čachtice castle: Erzsébet Báthory*). Budapest, 1985 (Labirintus (Labyrinth)); Tünde Lengyel and Gábor Várkonyi, *Báthory Erzsébet. Egy asszony élete* (*Erzsébet Báthory: A woman’s life*). Budapest, 2010.

⁶³ *Lorántffy Zsuzsanna album* (*The Zsuzsanna Lorántffy album*), ed. Edit Tamás. Sárospatak, 2000 (Pamphlets of the Rákóczi Museum in Sárospatak, 39); reprint of the Katalin Péter study published here: Péter 2012, pp. 35–94; Tamás 2000.

⁶⁴ Monok, 2012, pp. 227–44.

⁶⁵ Cf. István Monok, “Mitől modern egy kora újkori könyvtár Magyarországon és Erdélyben?” (“What makes a library modern in early modern Hungary and Transylvania?”), in *Hagyomány, egység, korszerűség. Az Egyházi*

In addition to the short catalogue of the books found in Judit Révay's room, we are aware of two seventeenth-century female-owned libraries. "Female-owned" is understood in the sense already used in the specialist literature with reference to the eighteenth century: a collection of books built up separately from the husband's. One such collection is Judit Veér's, catalogued in 1676.⁶⁶ There is a mention of seventeen books, possibly more. Judit Veér was the wife of Chancellor Mihály Teleki and a mother who supervised her sons' education very carefully. She was in communication with professors at the College of Nagyenyed (today's Aiud in Romania) and tried to keep abreast of political matters too. This small library was briefly described by monographer Betti Homonnai,⁶⁷ and became the subject of a much more comprehensive analysis in the light of historical sources by Zsuzsa Font.⁶⁸ Font points out that Judit Veér did not read Latin, and cites a source as evidence for this claim. Indeed, all of Judit Veér's books were written in Hungarian, and included Bibles, devotional literature, books on daily religious practice such as a catechism and prayer books, gardening books, and historical songs intended for entertainment. Zsuzsa Font cites an auxiliary source, according to which an acquaintance of Judit Veér by the name of Anna Bessenyei borrowed a work by Ferenc Pápai Páriz ("a medicinal book") from her in 1693. Font is also persuasive in her claim that Judit Veér participated in planning her sons' foreign study. Actual travel instructions were presumably drafted by someone else on her behalf, but she supervised the process on an ongoing basis. In my opinion, this extraordinary woman's portrait could not be any more remarkable even if hundreds of books had been found and catalogued in her room.

In the library of Transylvanian Princess Anna Bornemissza at Radnót (Iernut, in today's Romania), 104 books were found.⁶⁹ Almost all were in Hungarian. Analyzed thematically, her collection is certainly broader than the previous library. Entertaining literature has given way to proper literary merit (Bálint Balassi, Péter Beniczky, István Gyöngyösi), and there are some didactic tales. There are also several cookery books, descriptions of gardens, many volumes of sermons for various occasions, religious debates, and legal manuals. Among the non-Calvinist texts there are some on the life of Saint Francis, which – as instances of the *imitatio Christi* genre – belong to the confessionally non-specific category of devotional literature. János Herepei, who published the catalogue for the first time,⁷⁰ noted that these books must certainly have belonged to the princess. As a final point, I would stress that special editions were produced for her, with her supralibros, a clear indication of bibliophilic interest.

In conclusion, I would like to underline those facts which transcend the "usual" and "self-explanatory" assessments of female readership in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Anyone who learned to read and write could own a school textbook, a catechism, a prayer book, a book of Bible extracts, a herbarium, or a

Könyvtárak Egyesülése 2009. November 10-i, jubileumi konferenciájának előadásai (Tradition, unity, modernity. Proceedings of the jubilee conference of the Association of Ecclesiastical Libraries, 10 November 2009), ed. Botond Gáborjáni Szabó, Debrecen, 2010, pp. 16–29; Id. "Udvartartási minták, korszerű ismeretanyag a 16–17. század fordulójának főúri könyvtáraiban Magyarországon" ("Patterns in court households and items of modern knowledge in the libraries of Hungarian nobility at the turn of the sixteenth to seventeenth centuries"), in *Színlelés és rejtőzködés. A kora újkori magyar politika szerepjátékai (Pretence and concealment: role play in early modern Hungarian politics)*, eds. Nóra G. Etényi and Ildikó Horn, pp. 67–76. Budapest, 2010.

⁶⁶ *Repository* 1994/2, pp. 125–26.

⁶⁷ Betti Homonnai, *Veér Judit életrajza (The biography of Judit Veér)*. Budapest, 1914.

⁶⁸ Teleki Pál *külföldi tanulmányútja. Levelek, számadások, iratok 1695–1700 (Pál Teleki's foreign study journeys. Letters, accounts, documents)*, ed. Zsuzsa Font, Szeged, 1989 (*Fontes Rerum Scholasticarum*, III), pp. 416–18.

⁶⁹ *Repository* 1994/2, pp. 71–74.

⁷⁰ János Herepei, "Bornemissza Anna fejedelemszony radnóti könyvtára" ("The library of Princess Anna Bornemissza in Iernut"), *Erdélyi Múzeum* (47) 1942, pp. 483–92; reprinted in *Repository* 1971, pp. 74–83.

cookery book (generally handwritten). But when it came to entertaining literature, history books, poetry collections, publications on fashion and etiquette in high society and other situations, not just anybody could be in possession of such titles. We cannot base our image of female readers solely on data about actual book ownership. On the one hand, inherited books were not necessarily read, and on the other, anyone could make use of the library of other family members. When contextualizing these readings, it always needs to be considered what other books were owned by the family – in other words, what works were potentially accessible to any given female reader. In addition, research must also look at the social roles such a person was destined to fulfill and her performance in these areas. In many cases mere presence in certain situations (such as the judicature, worship, funerals, festive processions, briefing of stewards, etc.) reflects a degree of knowledge based on literacy, albeit not necessarily acquired directly by the person actually involved in these activities. If books containing such knowledge were available in the immediate or extended family, then it was simply a matter of intent, vocation, and the will to make use of them. Women have never been short of any of these characteristics.